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Security Council

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5111th meeting

Thursday, 13 January 2005, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Bielsa	(Argentina)
Members:	Algeria	Mr. Baali
	Benin	Mr. Zinsou
	Brazil	Mr. Sardenberg
	China	Mr. Zhang Yishan
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Kitaoka
	Philippines	Mr. Baja
	Romania	Mr. Dumitru
	Russian Federation	Mr. Denisov
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Manongi
	United States of America	Mr. Danforth

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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05-20818 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Farewell to the Permanent Representative of the United States, Ambassador John C. Danforth

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): As this is the last time that Ambassador John Danforth will participate in the Council's deliberations in his current capacity as Permanent Representative of the United States, I wish to take this opportunity to express to him, on behalf of the members of the Council, our appreciation of him as a colleague and friend. Ambassador Danforth will likely best be remembered as having initiated and led the Security Council's meetings in Nairobi, Kenya, on 18 and 19 November last year, marking the first time in over 30 years that the Security Council met on the African continent. Indeed, the fact that the parties were able to sign the comprehensive peace agreement in Nairobi on 9 January is due in no small part to the Council's efforts, under the leadership of Ambassador Danforth, to encourage the Naivasha process during its meetings in the Kenyan capital.

In bidding Ambassador Danforth a fond farewell, the other members of the Council and I wish him every success in his new endeavours.

Mr. Danforth (United States of America): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for your very kind words, and I hope that the Council will indulge me for just a few words of my own.

Let me say what an excellent experience I have had here. It has lasted only a little over six months, but I can remember when President Bush telephoned me and asked me if I would serve as the United States representative to the United Nations. I asked the President whether he believed this was an important job and whether he thought that the United Nations was important, and he assured me that, in his view, it was. On that representation, I agreed to take this job, and the experience that I have had serving here has proved to me that the United Nations is indeed very, very important. I think that it is important to the world, and I think that it is important to the United States.

Clearly, as you pointed out, Sir, with respect to the Sudan, the Security Council did play an instrumental role. I do not think that there is any doubt about that. The parties recognize that. The various peacekeeping efforts that we have put in place, the United Nations response to the tsunami disaster — all of these are instances where the United Nations has demonstrated its essential quality.

I personally have been impressed by my colleagues on the Security Council — impressed by their seriousness, impressed by their competence, and particularly impressed by the way in which very diverse nations have joined together in serious efforts to address important questions. It struck me as odd, in the first month or so, how we would get all tied up in wordsmithing — the difference between "demands" and "urges", or the difference between "measures" and "sanctions", and so on. But, thinking about it, it really is evidence of the fact that people from all over the world are trying to reach out together to bridge differences and define formulations that bridge differences and allow us to move forward in addressing matters of very serious concern.

A lot of people have criticized the United Nations, especially recently, and there is a lot to criticize in the United Nations — the oil-for-food issue, the problem of abuses by peacekeepers, especially in the Congo. There will always be things to criticize, but those points of criticism should not, and do not, detract from the essential value of the United Nations.

Insofar as my own country is concerned, a lot of people have voiced concern, even opposition, to the United Nations. I think the reasons for that are understandable. People have complained, "Well, the United Nations does not always support the United States", especially on the issue of the war in Iraq. Various representatives of various countries and people in the Secretariat from time to time make comments that we would rather not have them make. I would simply say in that connection that the United States is a big country, a very strong country. It is a well-meaning country; it really tries to do the right thing. Nobody likes opposition, and nobody likes criticism. But simply because the United States is big and strong, it is important that we be particularly open to the views of other people and to views that sometimes are different from our own.

We have a concept in our own country called "checks and balances", a governmental concept. It is very important, I think, the stronger you are, to be a country that listens and that takes on board the views

of others, even though we may not end up agreeing with those views. The United Nations is a place where we can speak, where the United States can speak; it is also a place where can listen, whether we end up agreeing or disagreeing with what we hear. So, when President Bush said to me that the United Nations is important, it seems to me, as I leave this post, that it is even more important than I thought it was when I came here. The United Nations is important for the welfare and stability of the world, and it is important for the welfare of the United States as well.

Mr. President, I thank you for your very kind remarks, and I want to thank my colleagues on the Council for their friendship and for their support these last six months.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the representative of the United States for the very kind words he addressed to us.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Prendergast: In my briefing last month, I highlighted the potential for positive change presented by current developments in the Middle East. There remain many risks and the possibility of setbacks, but I am pleased to be able to report this morning that the overall trend of recent events tends to confirm that there exists a real opportunity to begin the long-delayed implementation of the road map's provisions and to start moving once again towards a settlement of the conflict.

A new Palestinian President has been elected in a vote that is reported to have been conducted in a politically competitive, yet peaceful, atmosphere. We welcome President Mahmoud Abbas as the representative of the Palestinian people and extend our congratulations to him and to the entire Palestinian population in the occupied Palestinian territory. We also congratulate the Palestinian Central Elections Commission for the organization of credible and genuine elections under challenging conditions. The Palestinians have thus successfully completed another critical step in the historic democratic transition in the occupied Palestinian territory.

A total of 775,146 Palestinians cast their votes in the 9 January poll, 60,000 more than voted in the 1996 elections. Some 800 international observers and 7,000 national observers monitored the vote. The observation missions are agreed that, in the main, the election was contested vigorously and administered fairly. The observation mission sent by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and the Carter Center said in its preliminary statement on the vote, on 10 January:

> "The election was contested vigorously and administered fairly. Election day was orderly and generally peaceful. [...] The successful organization of this election demonstrates the potential for the start of a new era in Palestinian politics and the development of representative and accountable governance."

Similarly, the European Union (EU) Electoral Observation Mission's Chief Observer, former French Prime Minister Michel Rocard, stated:

> "As a result of this electoral process, the Palestinian people will benefit from a democratically elected and internationally recognized leadership, which will enable them to start to face the difficult challenges that lie ahead."

Israel played a commendable part in facilitating the elections, although some problems remained and observers had to raise the issue of restrictions on the freedom of movement. Overall, the situation remained

calm on election day, as Israeli forces generally allowed free movement and reduced their own activity inside the Palestinian areas.

The United Nations continued its long-standing work in support of the Palestinian Central Elections Commission and provided technical assistance for the preparation and conduct of the elections. We also established a United Nations Liaison Support Unit, which facilitated contacts with Palestinian and Israeli authorities and extended assistance to many of the international observers present in the occupied Palestinian territory. Our technical support to the Palestinians will continue, with a focus on the upcoming elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council, scheduled for 17 July.

The Council will also recall that the first round of elections to municipal councils was held in 26 communities on 23 December, with some 150,000 eligible voters choosing from among more than 800 candidates. Those elections — the first at the municipal level since 1967 — witnessed a high-local voter turnout of up to 81 per cent. One encouraging result of the vote was that women won 51 out of a total of 297 seats in the 26 municipalities. The next round of local elections is due to take place in 11 communities in the Gaza Strip on 27 January.

The commitment of the Palestinian people to democracy and its institutions is a strong foundation on which President Abbas can build. We look forward to working with the new President of the Palestinian Authority on the implementation of the road map and towards the realization of a viable two-State solution.

There is not only a new Palestinian leadership. There is also a new Israeli coalition Government in place to tackle the implementation of Prime Minister Sharon's withdrawal initiative. The new Cabinet, in which the Likud party has been joined by Labor, as well as United Torah Judaism, is expected to decide later this month on the evacuation of settlements in the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank.

As we have previously stated in this Council, we welcome and support the Israeli disengagement initiative as an important step towards achieving our common objective of an end to the occupation that began in 1967 and the establishment of an independent, sovereign, viable and contiguous Palestinian State alongside a secure Israel.

Set in this context, Prime Minister Sharon's initiative provides a real opportunity to move ahead. The plan should be implemented as part of the road map and in coordination between the new Israeli Government and the new Palestinian leadership. In this context, it is welcome news that Prime Minister Sharon and the Palestinian President have already spoken of their intention to meet in the coming weeks. As I said here last month, the United Nations remains ready to assist the parties to maintain momentum at this crucial time and to shoulder their respective burdens.

More generally, we believe that the international community will need to engage proactively to help the process along and to determine how best it can contribute to the revitalization of a sustainable peace process between the parties. The present period of opportunity challenges not only the parties, but all of us.

Situations such as the present one in the Middle East are dynamic. They either evolve positively or they regress. They do not stand still for long. This underlines the need to develop momentum in the peace process and to maintain it. Confidence-building measures can be very helpful in restoring trust on both sides. I am glad to report the very positive development of Israel's release of 159 Palestinian prisoners on 27 December.

Yet, although the potential for positive change and progress continues to be enormous, both have, literally, come under fire on an almost daily basis since my last briefing. In the past month, 64 Palestinians and 3 Israelis have been killed, and 243 Palestinians and 46 Israelis have been wounded.

In the six weeks before last weekend's elections, Palestinian militants fired a total of 210 Qassam rockets and mortar shells against Israeli settlements in Gaza and civilian targets inside Israel. One Israeli settler and one Thai worker were killed as a result of those attacks. This marked increase in attacks came despite the admirable public calls by PLO Chairman and now President Mahmoud Abbas to end rocket attacks against Israeli targets. We hope that the new Palestinian leadership will meet its security reform obligations under the road map and do its utmost to prevent such attacks and bring to justice the perpetrators.

In the same period, Israeli forces conducted a total of 40 military incursions and bulldozing

operations, causing death and injury to Palestinian civilians as well as militants. In one tragic incident, on 4 January, seven Palestinian civilians were killed, including at least five children from the same family, when an IDF tank shell hit an agricultural area in Beit Lahia. During a military operation in Khan Younis that ended on 19 December, 11 Palestinians, at least three of whom were civilian, were killed, and 50, including several children, were injured. Once again, we have to remind Israel of its legal obligations under international law to ensure the safety of Palestinian civilians and to refrain from the disproportionate use of force.

We call on both parties to exercise restraint and to focus their efforts now on ending the violence, the terror and the military operations that kill and injure civilians and destroy civilian property and infrastructure. In that context, it is positive to note the new Palestinian President's reiteration of his long-standing position of advocating an end to the armed uprising as the way to confront the occupation. His call appears to be in accord with majority opinion among Palestinians. In a poll conducted by the Palestinian Centre for Public Opinion on 21 December, some 60 per cent of Palestinians expressed support for an end to armed struggle.

As the Council is aware, the General Assembly, in its resolution ES-10/15, requested that the Secretary-General establish a register of damage in connection with the barrier. The Secretary-General, on Tuesday, 11 January 2005, sent a letter to the President of the General Assembly setting out a framework for the register. It will consist of an independent board, legal and technical experts and a small secretariat — a registry. The board will have overall responsibility for the register and will establish rules and regulations governing the work of the registry. We have aimed to develop a structure that will focus on the technical task of gathering claims of damage relating to the construction of the barrier. Details of the staffing, size and cost of the office remain to be worked out, and on those issues the Secretary-General will revert to the Assembly in due course.

The construction of the barrier and restrictions on movement in the form of checkpoints, curfews and the permit system are the chief reasons for the continuing socio-economic crisis in the Palestinian areas. As we have repeatedly stated, lifting restrictions on freedom of movement is an indispensable ingredient of economic recovery. World Bank President James Wolfensohn reiterated during a recent visit to the area that additional financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority could be considered feasible only if Israel eased the existing restrictions. That remains a vital measure to be taken.

The Palestinian Authority's stability — and with it, prospects for real and tangible reform and political progress — is crucially dependent on a sound fiscal base. Although the Palestinian Authority exhibited strong revenue performance in 2004, it has remained under pressure, owing to a much lower disbursement of external budget support than originally envisaged and to a growing wage bill. December salaries could be paid only as a result of a welcome $20 million contribution from the United States and the release of arrears by the Government of Israel. Continued financial support for the Palestinian Authority remains of great significance.

I have listed the positive developments of the last month, as well as the difficulties. How can we best assist the parties to move forward towards peace and to avoid the painful and all-too-frequent setbacks suffered in the past? For that to be done effectively, we need to start by being clear about our own priorities. Also, it is crucial that we all work together, guided by the framework of the Quartet and the road map process, as agreed by the parties and by the Council. Thirdly, we need to impress on Israelis and Palestinians that both of them must act towards fulfilling their road map obligations.

Both parties have important steps to take. Israeli settlement activity — including the natural growth of settlements — has not been frozen, as Israel is obliged to do under the road map. During 2004, according to recent reports, the number of people living in West Bank and Gaza strip settlements rose by 6 per cent. Even the settlements in the Gaza Strip that are slated for evacuation grew by 7 per cent; indeed, three of them recorded growth rates of between 21 and 29 per cent over the previous year. On the Palestinian side, we want to see the establishment of credible and reformed institutions which make a tangible impact in terms of efforts by the Palestinian Authority to put an end to the violence and terror.

In this immediate transitional stage, it is crucial to support Palestinian reform efforts — especially in the areas of security and governance — and to ensure

that the Palestinian Authority is financially secure and able to meet the humanitarian needs of the population. In that context, we welcome Prime Minister Blair's initiative to convene an international meeting, and we believe it will provide a valuable opportunity to discuss important issues on the agenda of the new Palestinian leadership. We consider that initiative to be an important step towards implementing the road map and achieving its full objectives.

It is also urgent to encourage both parties to resume contacts and work together to prepare for an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and part of the West Bank. Coordination between the parties and active support from the international community are needed to achieve a successful disengagement plan that will lead to further steps on the implementation of the road map and the resumption of full peace negotiations.

A stark illustration of how fragile the situation is in the Middle East was recently given on another front of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Six months of relative quiet along the Blue Line were disrupted on 9 January, the day of the Palestinian election. The Security Council was briefed on Monday about the details of that deplorable incident, in which a Hizbullah roadside bomb attack against an Israeli military patrol vehicle killed one Israel Defence Forces (IDF) soldier and wounded three others, and subsequent IDF tank and machine-gun fire killed a French officer serving with the United Nations Observation Group in Lebanon and wounded a Swedish colleague.

The Hizbullah attack and its aftermath constituted grave violations of the Blue Line. In a statement, the Secretary-General condemned the military escalation and urged both parties to exercise maximum restraint. He also underscored the responsibility of both Lebanon and Israel to ensure the safety of United Nations personnel deployed in the region.

Prior to that incident, the situation along the Blue Line had been relatively calm since my last briefing to the Council. The only violations that had taken place were Israeli overflights. Seventeen Israeli air violations of the Blue Line were recorded — nine of them on a single day, 29 December, when a total of 20 Israeli jets crossed the Blue Line into Lebanese airspace. Both the Force Commander of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the Secretary-General's Personal Representative for Southern Lebanon expressed their concern over those violations and reiterated the Organization's call on the Israeli authorities to halt them.

There has been no progress yet on the Syrian-Israeli track, despite yet another offer of mediation, this time by the Government of Turkey. The resumption and completion of peace negotiations between Israel and Syria and the implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) remain indispensable ingredients of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Let me close by saying that there is a palpable sense of expectation of real, substantial and sustainable change in the region. Optimism has — at least for now — replaced long and bitter years of disillusion, despair and hopelessness. The potential is there; but so is the danger that the fragile new process might falter and fail. We must not allow that to happen.

Israelis and Palestinians have a great deal of work ahead of them. Their respective new leaderships are in a position to carry out much of it, but they will continue to need our help. We, the international community — particularly through the Quartet — need to lend our support, our assistance, our active engagement, to make clear to both parties that we expect real progress. The parties, in turn, need to take those steps necessary to implement the road map, to halt the bloodshed and suffering, and to move forward to achieve the goal of a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement in which two independent and viable States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Prendergast for his comprehensive briefing, keen analysis and balanced observations.

After consultations among members of the Security Council, I have been authorized to make the following statement on behalf of the Council:

> "The Security Council welcomes the Palestinian presidential election held on 9 January 2005. It commends the credible and fair character of the vote and congratulates the Palestinian people, who demonstrated their commitment to democracy by participating in the election under challenging conditions. The Council pays tribute to the Central Elections Commission, which played a key role in ensuring the successful conclusion of the election, and

expresses its appreciation for the contribution of international observers and for the support of the United Nations.

"The Security Council congratulates the newly elected President of the Palestinian Authority on his election.

"The Security Council looks forward to the convening of the Palestinian legislative elections in the near future and affirms the Council's continuing support for the Palestinian people in their democratic process.

"The Security Council supports the Palestinian Authority and its efforts to pursue the process of strengthening institutions.

"The Security Council underlines the importance of enhanced and expeditious international assistance to the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority.

"The Security Council stresses the need for the full implementation of the Quartet road map, as endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 1515 (2003), for the creation of an independent, viable, democratic and sovereign State of Palestine living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

"The Security Council calls upon Israelis and Palestinians to relaunch a genuine political process and advance towards a just and lasting peace in the region."

This statement will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2005/2.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.